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## Ars Dictaminis. Briefsteller und verbale Kommunikation in den 11. bis 13. Jahrhunderts

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The last few years have seen a flourishing in studies on *ars dictaminis*, the medieval art of letter and document writing, across Europe, but Florian Hartmann's monograph fruitfully covers a series of key, yet surprisingly quite neglected, aspects of it. Its significance inherently stems from the combination of its chronological and geographical remit. To date the thirteenth century, generally perceived to be the golden age of *ars dictaminis*, has played centre stage in secondary literature, even though it has often been approached in relation to, and as a possible lead up to, Renaissance humanism. Hartmann's work, instead, examines the long twelfth century, from the last decades of the eleventh to the early thirteenth century, which witnessed the dawn and consolidation of *ars dictaminis*, but, in turn, has tended to be treated as a prelude to the above-mentioned golden age. The same largely applies to the other main focus of the work, which aims to study the place of *ars dictaminis* in Communal Italy specifically, which was indubitably one of the epicentres of the genre, even though the book considers links and exchanges with other pivotal areas too, from France to the papacy. The long twelfth century saw the formation of the city communes too, yet the thirteenth century is far more studied.<sup>1</sup>

The study starts with an introductory chapter that sets the scene by illustrating the genre and its stylistic conventions, as well as an excursus on influences from ancient rhetoric and a discussion of scholarship as well as of the methods, aims and structure of the work. Yet chapters two and three are the core sections of the work, the first of which focuses on the philological and historical development of *ars dictaminis* throughout this period. It opens by focusing on the works of Alberic of Montecassino and their context, especially highlighting links with the papal curia. It then examines the reception of the genre in northern Italy at the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Grillo, 'La frattura inesistente: l'età del comune consolare nella recente storiografia', *Archivio storico italiano*, 167 (2009), 673-700.

dawn of the city communes, exploring possible channels through which it was achieved (see papal reformers) and the adaptation that the genre underwent in order to fit into local lay use. The Investiture Contest, Bologna and its schools loom large there, and in that respect the book offers an interesting parallel to the related contemporary revival of jurisprudence. Yet it also features a ‘corrective example’, considering the work of an anonymous dictator from Pavia. That is followed by an examination of the progress of the genre through the twelfth century, especially in relation to French occurrences.

The other main theme of the monograph is links between *ars dictaminis* and the social and political life of Communal Italy, to which the other main portion of the work is devoted. Once again, scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on those links regarding the thirteenth century rather than the twelfth. Hartmann shows that works of *ars dictaminis* already mirrored the political discourse, social structure, and rules of communication of the city communes in the twelfth century, arguing that written and verbal eloquence already played an important role in polities such as those, which were built on communal legitimacy. This is done by exploring the role of the *dictatores* and their public, and by focusing especially on horizontal bonds, such as *amicitia* and *coniuratio*.

The last section considers the significance of one distinctive output of *ars dictaminis*, that is, model letters, as historical sources. It is a natural corollary of the previous sections, but covers another neglected topic. Hartmann focuses in particular on the collection by Master Guido from the late 1150s, which is rich in references to the early schools of Bologna, but also on other topics, such as the conflict between Frederick Barbarossa and the Lombard cities. As noted by Camargo years ago, ‘the *dictatores* could and did produce letters and documents that looked deceptively like the real thing, but were in fact only loosely based on genuine documents or completely fabricated’ and ‘must be presumed guilty [of being fiction] until positive evidence can be cited to the contrary’, which is usually missing.<sup>2</sup> In other words they are on the whole verisimilar rather than genuine documents, a condition that seems to

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<sup>2</sup> M. Camargo, *Ars dictaminis, ars dictandi* (Turnhout, 1991), 43–4.

have frequently put off historians from using them. In the past positivist empiricism has shunned those model documents, or has left them in a limbo by placing some of them among the *additamenta* or *deperdita* of collections of sources. In contrast, other old editions took some of them as genuine without considering their background. I became aware of that when I came across an overlooked thirteenth century papal privilege confirming the lawfulness of the Lombard League, which would have been a bombshell during the conflict between the League and Emperor Frederick II, but which scholarship had ignored because it has come to us in a collection of model letters.<sup>3</sup> Yet in many ways the verisimilar nature of those sources makes them even more intriguing, not to mention that the neglect they suffered means that they are often untapped resources. They are particularly valuable for the twelfth century, which saw the birth and consolidation of the city communes, but for which sources are far scarcer than for later periods.

Hartmann's work is therefore a valuable contribution to the scholarship on both *ars dictaminis* and Communal Italy. In that respect, it will provide further food for thought for the ongoing reassessment, and softening, of the traditionally perceived break between the seemingly inchoate and aristocratic age of the consuls in the twelfth century and the more mature, state-like and inclusive age of the podestà in the thirteenth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> G. Raccagni, 'The teaching of rhetoric and the magna carta of the Lombard cities: the Peace of Constance, the empire and the papacy in the world of Guido Faba and his leading contemporary colleagues (first half of the thirteenth century)', *Journal of Medieval History*, 39 (2013), 61-79.

<sup>4</sup> For that reassessment: Grillo, 'La frattura inesistente'.

